

UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL
13 September 1983

WASHINGTON
LEAKS
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Senators today sharply criticized a Reagan administration plan to curb leaks to media of classified information and to require government employees with top-secret clearance to submit speeches and articles for review before delivery or publication.

Sen. Charles Mathias, R-Md., who chaired a hearing of the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee, noted that a national security directive would require thousands of civil servants to abide by the pre-publication agreement even after they left public service.

The Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi, asked the committee to consider relying on current laws to ensure that classified information is protected.

President Reagan issued a directive in March requiring all government employees wanting access to secret materials to sign a secrecy pledge. That pledge means the employees must submit for scrutiny all writings about both secret and non-secret intelligence matters and submit to polygraph tests when asked.

The society complained the pledge would include even works of fiction.

"A broad interpretation of the president's directive would consign these thousands of men and women to a virtual vow of silence on some of the crucial issues facing our nation," Mathias said in an opening statement. "I am confident that this chilling scenario, so antithetical to our most cherished values, is not what the president intended in this directive."

Mathias was joined by Sen. Thomas Eagleton, D-Mo., who warned the pre-publication requirement "enters into the constitutionally sensitive area of the First Amendment exercise of free speech."

He added, "As of now, I am simply not convinced that the burdensome and intrusive prior restraint procedure mandated by this directive will enhance our national security and will be worth the sacrifices."

Representatives of the State, Defense and Justice departments appeared to defend the directive as necessary to prevent unauthorized disclosures of classified information.

"The sole purpose of pre-publication review is to permit deletion of classified information before it is made public," said Deputy Assistant Attorney General Richard Willard. "This program does not permit the government to censor material because it is embarrassing or critical."

But, Mathias said, the committee had asked each agency how often such unauthorized disclosures had occurred in the past five years and between them, the three departments came up with only two instances.

Willard said the reason for that is that the government has no formal process for monitoring such disclosures.

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